

# The Structure and Rhetorical Techniques of the Classical Poem “Caught in a Rain by a Stream”

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## Abstract

The classical Chinese poem “Caught in a Rain by a Stream” is a quatrain with seven-character lines. It vividly describes the rain and the tender and beautiful scene of the sunset. The features of this poem worthy of study its psychological and emotional factors, expressed by the poem’s characters though difficult to see. Thus, this study explores the poem’s structure and rhetorical techniques to further clarify the psychological and emotional aspects deeply hidden in its characters. This study adopts a qualitative research method to analyse the characters, the lines, and the overall context. The research findings also include a consideration of the spatial structure and rhetorical techniques applied. This study endeavours to help readers learn more about classical Chinese poetry.

**Key words:** Tao-Jung Tsui, Caught in a Rain by a Stream, classical poetry

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The classical Chinese poem “Caught in a Rain by a Stream” is a four-line seven-character poem, totalling 28 characters composed by Ts’ui Tao-jung. The exact dates of his birth and death are unknown. He was born around 879 B.C. during the Tang dynasty during the reign of Emperor Xizong whom Tsui served as a County Magistrate. He was good at writing quatrains. Nine volumes of the poems in The Complete Collection of Tang Poems (Quantangshi) are attributed to him (Chang, 1989). This seven-character poem is about the characteristics of the summer rain and is quite successful. One of the features of this poem is that it never mentions the season as summer. However, it describes the natural phenomena of the summer rain authentically and vividly. The meaning and pronunciation (Wade-Giles Romanization) of the characters are summarized in Table 1 according to their order of appearance.

Table 1 – The Roman-spellings and original meanings of the characters in “Caught in a Rain by a Stream”

Line		Order of characters						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
First	A	To sit	To see	Black	Cloud	To be held	Fierce	Rain
	B	Tso	Kan	Hei	Yun	Hsien	Meng	Yu
Second	A	To sprout	To spray	Front	Mountain	This	Only	Sunny
	B	Pen	Sa	Chien	Shan	Tzu	Tu	Ching
Third	A	Suddenly	Surprised	Cloud	Rain	Be	Head	Above
	B	Hu	Ching	Yun	Yu	Tsai	Tou	Shang
Fourth	A	Yet	Is	Mountain	Front	Evening	Illumination	Bright
	B	Chueh	Shih	Shan	Chien	Wan	Chao	Ming

Note: A: Original meaning; B: Roman spelling .

At the literal level, the poem describes the scenery witnessed by the author. In fact, the author’s psychological state is hidden within the characters. Because the author’s literal expression is rather graceful and restrained, it is difficult to understand his mood based on a literal reading of the characters. To help readers understand the deeper implications of the characters, the paper discusses the poem from various perspectives, beginning with the most basic pronunciation and meaning of the characters, to their interpretation, and concluding with an analysis of the structure and the rhetorical techniques applied, to clarify its implications and increase the depth of appreciation for the poem.

## 2. Methods

This study applies the content and concept analysis method, which are both qualitative research methods (Wang,

1980), to analyse the pronunciation and meaning of each character in the poem. It also performs semantic analyses of the words composed of two or more characters, including an analysis of their meaning and situation. The meaning analysis was performed to interpret the meanings of the characters and words, while the situation analysis was performed to analyse the environments presented by those characters and words. After the characters and words were analysed, every line was also analysed, to explore the context and connections among the poem's four lines. The actual steps are: (1) analyse the pronunciations and meanings of the characters, (2) translate the poem from classical Chinese to vernacular Chinese, (3) analyse the structure of this poem, and (4) analyse the rhetorical techniques applied to compose this poem. The foundation and principles of rhetorical analysis are based on concepts of situations (Chen, 2005) and arts (Lin, 1981; Jing, 1977). The rhetorical analysis of the technique of imitation integrates the concept analysis of visualization and description of touching (Wu, 2000). The rhetorical analysis of the technique of conversion integrates the concept analysis of non-living and living things (Guan, 1993). The rhetorical analysis of the technique of antithesis includes the concept analysis of contrast (Chen, 2009). The rhetorical analysis of the technique of rhyming comprises the concept analysis of rhymes (Chiu, 2013). The rhetorical analysis of the technique of exclamation encompasses the concept analysis of emotion-related words (Huang, 2004). The above-mentioned concepts are the basis of the indicators used in this study to analyse the rhetorical techniques.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 The Context Link Analysis for "Caught in a Rain by a Stream"

By comparing the two different translations presented below, it can be found that there are more descriptions in the second translation than the first translation, which is based on the literal meaning of the poem. The reason is because the second translation is based on the context links and the implications were explored through the context, as analysed below. The character "tso (to sit)" contains no information regarding the place for sitting. However, according to the title of the poem, "Caught in a Rain by a Stream", we can understand that the author was sitting by a stream. The second half of the second line reveals that only the place where the author sat was sunny. Judging from the character "tu (only)", compared to the rainy area that lay ahead of the protagonist, the sunny area was relatively small. The scene the third line describes was not real. The author was preoccupied for a while and thought the rain cloud had moved above his head. The real scene the author saw was the rain cloud drifting by speedily. He felt that way and made the description only because he was absent minded at the time. The beginning of the fourth line emphasizes the author coming back to his senses, as what the third line describes was not real. What was real was the scene the author saw after he came back to his senses, the scene of the rays of light from the evening setting sun in front of him. Table 2 below shows the two different translations by researcher to facilitate a comparison.

Table 2 – Two translations of "Caught in a Rain by a Stream"

Line	Type	Translation in vernacular Chinese
First line	A	I watched the dark cloud with heavy rain while sitting.
	B	I watched the dark cloud over the mountain ahead spraying heavy rain while sitting by a stream.
Second line	A	The mountain ahead was sprayed and only this area was sunny.
	B	The rain area was large and the rainwater sprayed on the mountain ahead, while only this small area was sunny and cloudless.
Third line	A	I was surprised that the rain cloud was above my head all of a sudden.
	B	The rain cloud ahead moved very fast and while I was absent minded, to my surprise, the rain cloud was already above my head.
Fourth line	A	But it was the rays of the light from the evening setting sun by the mountain ahead.
	B	When I came back to my senses, I realized that it was the rays of the bright light from the evening setting sun in front.

Note: A: The translation based on the literal meanings; B: The translation based on the context.

#### 3.2 The Analysis of the Spatial Structure

The spatial structure of this poem contains four parts: (1) the dark cloud far away and the sunny sky above a stream area nearby; (2) the heavy rain far away and the good weather in a stream area nearby; (3) the torrential rain from the dark cloud high in the sky falling on the mountain ahead rapidly, which is a vertical visual

description; and (4) the clear vision while the dark cloud was over the sky, leading to the close-up description of the torrential rain “spraying”. We found three concepts of artistic description from the four parts above: (a) the visual perspective from faraway to nearby, showing the large area of the dark cloud and the small area of the sunny sky; (b) the visual perspective moving vertically from a high place to a low one, showing the rainfall from the dark cloud; and (c) the close-up view, showing the rain as powerful as a spout of water spraying out. How might we describe this phenomenon? The lines imply that the scene before the author was not vague due to the cloud and mist, as his vision was clear. They also imply that the sun from the sky above a stream was not weak. Due to the shining bright light, the author could see clearly and described the rainfall using “pen-sa” (spraying) vividly. Figure 1 shows this spatial structure.

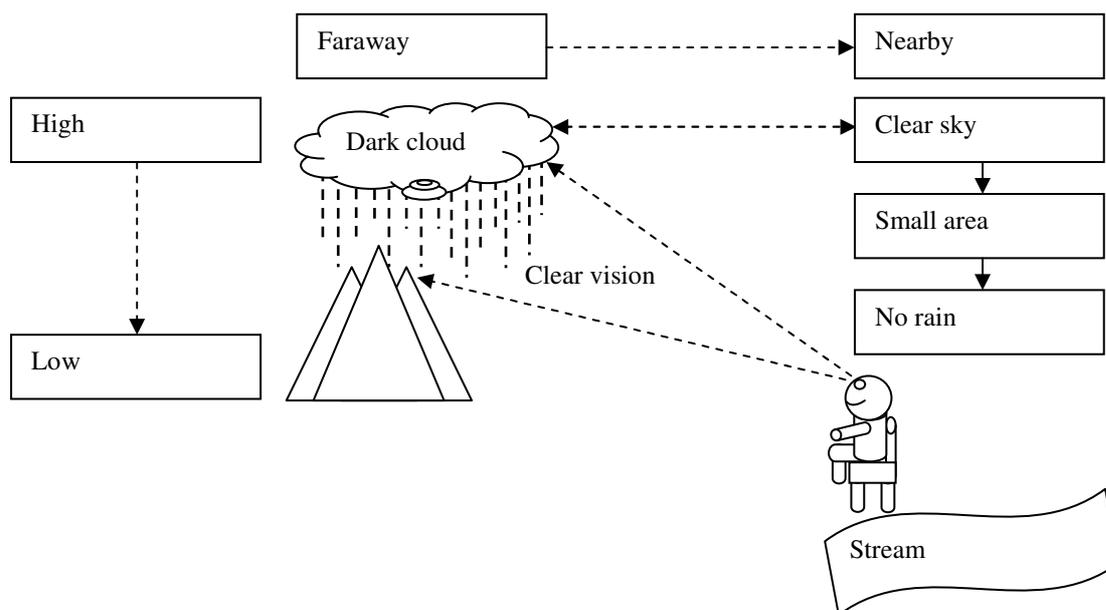


Figure 1 – The analysis of the spatial structure

### 3.3 The Analysis of the Psychological and Visual Prospects

The meanings of the third and fourth lines appear simple. Yet, there are time and space changes hidden among the words. The third line continues themes from the second line but is a turning point for the fourth line. The first character “hu (suddenly)” of the third line means a sudden change, the shock the author felt unexpectedly for he thought the dark cloud was above his head in a flash. This line implies that the dark cloud described in the first line was not still in the sky. The dark cloud the author saw was moving rapidly. Though absent earlier, it appeared suddenly. Due to this impression, when the author was absent minded, he had this imagination of the dark cloud coming to above his head right away and therefore was shocked. Why was he shocked? The reason is because the dark cloud and the torrential rain were closely connected. In other words, the torrential rain came with the dark cloud. This also implies that the author did not want to get wet in the rain. He was shocked so he wanted to hide from the rain. The analysis above is from the perspective of the author’s psychological state. The real situation differed. What the third line describes is unreal. The fourth line which describes how the author came to his senses from a state of being preoccupied and saw the rays of the light from the evening setting sun in front of him, is real. This line implies that the dark cloud was gone and the rain stopped. The afterglow of the setting sun replaced them. Thus, as shown in Table 3, the author’s state of being preoccupied by a stream was gone and then he returned to the real world. Moreover, according to the description of the characteristics of the rain in this poem, it can be inferred that the season was summer, as summer is usually hot and convectional rain (a.k.a. thermal thunderstorm rain), which is usually heavy, short, and unpredictable, is very common in summer.

Table 3 - The analysis of the psychological and visual prospects

Third line	Fourth line
Psychological prospect	Visual prospect
The illusion while in the state of being preoccupied	The real scene after returning to normalcy
The thunderstorm was suddenly above the author's head.	The rays of the light from the evening setting sun shined upon the author.

### 3.4 The Rhetorical Analysis

The poem utilizes rhetorical techniques to provide descriptions that are mainly visual. That is, the author saw visually the “dark cloud”, the “torrential rain” “spraying”, and the “rays of the light from the evening setting sun”. The author described the sunny and clear sky using the second line. Besides the visual description, he also integrated the rhetorical concept of description of touching using the sense of touch through the skin. The character “ching (sunny)” of the third line indicates the emotional and psychological response of being shocked. It is a rhetorical concept of exclamation. The second line describes two different weather conditions, the rain and the sunny sky, forming a contrast. This is the rhetorical concept of antithesis. The original definition of the character “hsien (to be held)” of the first line is to hold in the mouth. This character was used to describe the dark cloud holding the torrential rain. This is the rhetorical concept of conversion. Comparing the dark cloud as a human or an animal holding the rain in his/its mouth is the rhetorical concept of conversion with the non-living thing, the dark cloud. The last character of the second line rhymes with the last character of the fourth line. This is the rhetorical concept of rhyming. Besides analysing the rhetorical techniques in the poem line by line, this study also analyses the poem from the aspects of the structure and the links and found the following rhetorical concepts: The “dark cloud” in the first line and the “sunny” in the second line form a visual contrast between black and white colours. The torrential rain in described by the first line and the warm and beautiful afterglow from the setting sun described by the fourth line form a visual contrast between “raining” and “sunny” weather conditions and an artistic conception contrast between “strong” and “weak” momentum. This is the rhetorical concept of antithesis. The psychological state of the author being shocked when he was absent minded and thought the rain cloud was suddenly above him described by the third line and the actual warm scene with the afterglow from the setting sun described by the fourth line form a contrast of “the unreal” and “the real” and a contrast between “shock” and “aesthetics”. This is the rhetorical concept of antithesis. Table 4 shows the analysis results of the rhetorical techniques between the lines and the overall rhetorical techniques.

Table 4 – The rhetorical analysis results for “Caught in a Rain by a Stream”

Line	Visualization	Description of touching	Exclamation	Antithesis	Conversion	Rhyming
First line	•					
Second line	•	•		•	•	
Third line			•			
Fourth line	•					
First line and fourth line				•		
Second line and fourth line						•
Third line and fourth line				•		

#### 4. Discussion

On the surface, it appears that the poem is merely about scenery. However, after analysing the author's mental state, it can be found that the author's psychological factors are hidden in the structure of this poem. By analysing the third line, we can see that the reason why the author was shocked by the sudden appearance of the rain cloud is a reflex from the aspect of psychology. In other words, the author's mental state was unstable and his fear was reflected by the sudden appearance of the rain cloud.

To extend the analysis further, it is found that the author saw the storm ahead and thought it was akin to the expected frustration in his career waiting ahead. Therefore, he was afraid that this would suddenly happen to him and hence the mental state, the reflex. However, in fact, when he came back to his senses, there was no rain cloud. Instead, he saw the warm afterglow of the setting sun before him. This seems to reveal the author's mental state of expecting a future circumstance as wonderful as the sunset.

#### 5. Conclusion

With only 28 characters, this poem of seven-character lines presents spectacular scenes and psychological states. By analysing the spatial structure and the rhetorical techniques applied, this study vividly reconstructed the author's experience of the summer rain. It is worth mentioning that, according to the rhetorical analysis results, the rhetorical techniques were applied not only to one single line but also between the lines.

In the aspect of the techniques applied to one single line, the technique of visualization was used three times, which is the most commonly applied technique, the technique of conversion was applied twice, and the techniques of description of touching, exclamation, and antithesis were all applied just once.

As for the rhetorical techniques applied between the lines, the technique of antithesis was applied twice, which is the most commonly applied technique. The importance of the technique of antithesis in this classical Chinese poem is obvious. Moreover, the exploration of the author's mental states and the implications of the descriptions of the shock and the warm scene is quite essential to appreciating this poem. This important issue warrants further research.

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